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VS.

THE CIRCUS OF CRIME

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FEATURING THE CIRCUS OF CRIME!
LIVEWIRE
CANNONBALL
The GAMBONNOS
STRONGMAN
FIRE-EATER
The CLOWN
TRAPPED! BY MEPHISTO'S FIERY PITS, I AM TRAPPED ONCE AGAIN--
--LOCKED AWAY IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS OF JOHNNY BLAZE--
--DENIED CONTACT WITH THE PHYSICAL WORLD! AND ALL--ALL BECAUSE OF THAT MOTORCYCLING FOOL!

GHOST RIDER® Vol. 1, No. 73, October, 1982. (U.S.P.S. 425-850) Published by MARVEL COMICS GROUP, James E. Galton, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Vice-President, Publishing. Milton Schiffman, Vice-President, Production. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. Published monthly. Copyright© 1982 by Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industries Corporation. All rights reserved. Price 60¢ per copy in the U.S. and 75¢ in Canada. Subscription rate $7.20 for 12 issues. Canada; $8.20. Foreign, $9.20. Printed in the U.S.A. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the conditions that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. GHOST RIDER (including all prominent characters featured in the issue), and the distinctive likenesses thereof, are trademarks of the MARVEL COMICS GROUP. Postmaster: Send address changes to Subscription Dept., Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10016.

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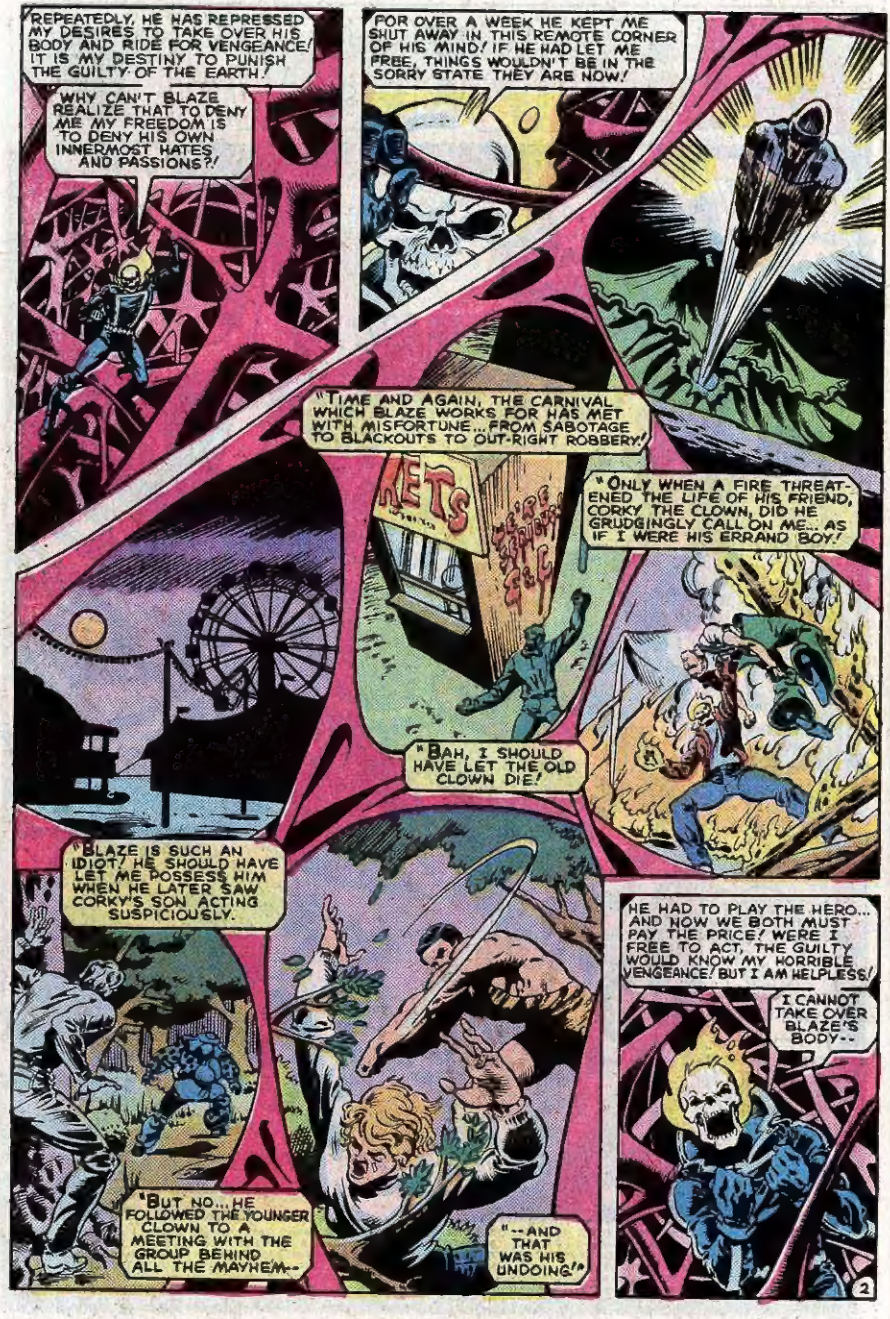
REPEATEDLY, HE HAS REPRESSED MY DESIRES TO TAKE OVER HIS BODY AND RIDE FOR VENGEANCE! IT IS MY DESTINY TO PUNISH THE GUILTY OF THE EARTH!
WHY CAN'T BLAZE REALIZE THAT TO DENY ME MY FREEDOM IS TO DENY HIS OWN INNERMOST HATES AND PASSIONS?!
FOR OVER A WEEK HE KEPT ME SHUT AWAY IN THIS REMOTE CORNER OF HIS MIND! IF HE HAD LET ME FREE, THINGS WOULDN'T BE IN THE SORRY STATE THEY ARE NOW!
"TIME AND AGAIN, THE CARNIVAL WHICH BLAZE WORKS FOR HAS MET WITH MISFORTUNE... FROM SABOTAGE TO BLACKOUTS TO OUT-RIGHT ROBBERY!
"ONLY WHEN A FIRE THREATENED THE LIFE OF HIS FRIEND, CORKY THE CLOWN, DID HE GRUDGINGLY CALL ON ME... AS IF I WERE HIS ERRAND BOY!
"BAH, I SHOULD HAVE LET THE OLD CLOWN DIE!
"BLAZE IS SUCH AN IDIOT! HE SHOULD HAVE LET ME POSSESS HIM WHEN HE LATER SAW CORKY'S SON ACTING SUSPICIOUSLY.
"BUT NO... HE FOLLOWED THE YOUNGER CLOWN TO A MEETING WITH THE GROUP BEHIND ALL THE MAYHEM--
"--AND THAT WAS HIS UNDOING!"
HE HAD TO PLAY THE HERO... AND NOW WE BOTH MUST PAY THE PRICE! WERE I FREE TO ACT, THE GUILTY WOULD KNOW MY HORRIBLE VENGEANCE! BUT I AM HELPLESS!
I CANNOT TAKE OVER BLAZE'S BODY--
2

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"--WHEN HE'S BEEN KNOCKED UNCONSCIOUS!"
THERE! THAT WILL TAKE CARE OF YOU, JOHNNY.
I WISH YOU COULD HEAR ME, SO I COULD TRY TO MAKE YOU UNDERSTAND. I DIDN'T WANT THIS... I REALLY WANTED TO GO STRAIGHT.
BUT MY OLD MAN WAS HURT PRETTY BAD IN THAT FIRE. IF I WANT TO RAISE THE MONEY I NEED FOR HIS TREATMENT, I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO CARRY OUT MY PLANS--
--FOR THE CIRCUS OF CRIME!
LOOKS LIKE OUR FEARLESS LEADER HAS DECIDED TO GRACE US WITH HIS PRESENCE!
3

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IF ONLY HE'D BEEN TRAPPED IN THAT FIRE I SET, THEN I'D BE THE ONE RUNNIN' THIS SHOW!
BLAZE IS TAKEN CARE OF FOR NOW.
I STILL SAY WE SHOULD'VE ACED HIM!
NO! THERE'LL BE NO KILLING AS LONG AS I'M RUNNING THINGS!
THE LAST THING WE NEED ARE MURDER RAPS HANGING OVER OUR HEADS!
IF YOU'RE SERIOUS ABOUT WANTING ME TO LEAD YOU, YOU'LL DO AS I SAY!
QUIT HORSING AROUND AND GIVE ME YOUR ATTENTION.
HE'S A WORSE BACK-BREAKER THAN THE RINGMASTER EVER WAS! AT LEAST THE OTHERS WERE SMART ENOUGH TO LEAVE THAT TOP-HATTED TWERP BEHIND WHEN WE BUSTED OUT OF PRISON.
OKAY, MR. CLOWN... I'LL FOLLOW YOUR ORDERS... FOR NOW.
PUT ALL YOUR GEAR IN THE TRUCK! I WANT TO MOVE OUT IN TEN MINUTES!
SHOOT, BOSS, WHAT'S THE HURRY?
4

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I WAS JUST ABOUT TO LASSO US SOME BREAK-FAST!
WITH UNERRING ACCURACY, LIVEWIRE'S ELECTRIFIED LARIAT ENSNARES ITS FLEEING PREY!
ZZAXXX
'ERE YA GO! I ALWAYS DID LIKE RABBIT STEW!
LIVEWIRE!
HECK, I'M JUST KIDDIN', CLOWN! THE CRITTER'S NOT EVEN HURT... JUST STUNNED!
I AM HUNGRY, THOUGH!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT YOUR BELLY! IT'LL SOON BE FULL OF CARNY FOOD!
SOON, JUST A FEW MILES AWAY--
QUENTIN CARNIVAL
CLOSED TODAY
--CARNIVAL OWNER RALPH QUENTIN RELATES THE SORRY STATE OF AFFAIRS TO RED FOWLER AND CYNTHIA RANDOLPH.
I JUST GOT WORD FROM MY INSURANCE AGENT, CHILDREN... MY POLICY IS CANCELLED. AS OF THIS MOMENT, WE ARE FLAT BUSTED!
IS THERE ANYTHING THAT CAN BE DONE, RALPH? A LOAN MAYBE?
ALL YOU NEED IS NEW MANAGEMENT!
5

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WHAT ON EARTH--?
SAY HELLO TO YOUR NEW PARTNERS, QUENTIN! WE'RE GONNA BRING MORE MONEY POURING INTO THIS CARNY THAN YOU'LL KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH!
MR. QUENTIN... THAT CLOWN'S VOICE! IT'S ELIOT... CORKY'S SON!
WHAT'S THE MEANING OF THIS, ELIOT?! DO YOU THINK YOU CAN JUST ROLL IN HERE AND TAKE OVER?
M-MAYBE HE CAN, RALPH!
DANG STRAIGHT WE CAN, LADY!
HEY!
MY BOYS AND I CAN RUN CIRCLES AROUND YOUR ENTIRE SHOW!
WHUNK
YAUUK!
SORRY, FOWLER... BUT IT'S NEXT TO IMPOSSIBLE TO SNEAK UP ON THE CRAFTY CLOWN!
AND LET'S NOT FORGET THE INTREPID GIRL REPORTER!
OH, NO! PLEASE--!
YOU JOINED THIS CARNIVAL TO GET A STORY FOR YOUR MAGAZINE, DIDN'T YOU? WELL, I'LL GIVE YOU A STORY YOU'LL NEVER FORGET!
GIVE ME A FEW MINUTES ALONE WITH THEM, BOYS! I THINK I CAN MAKE THEM SEE THINGS OUR WAY!
6

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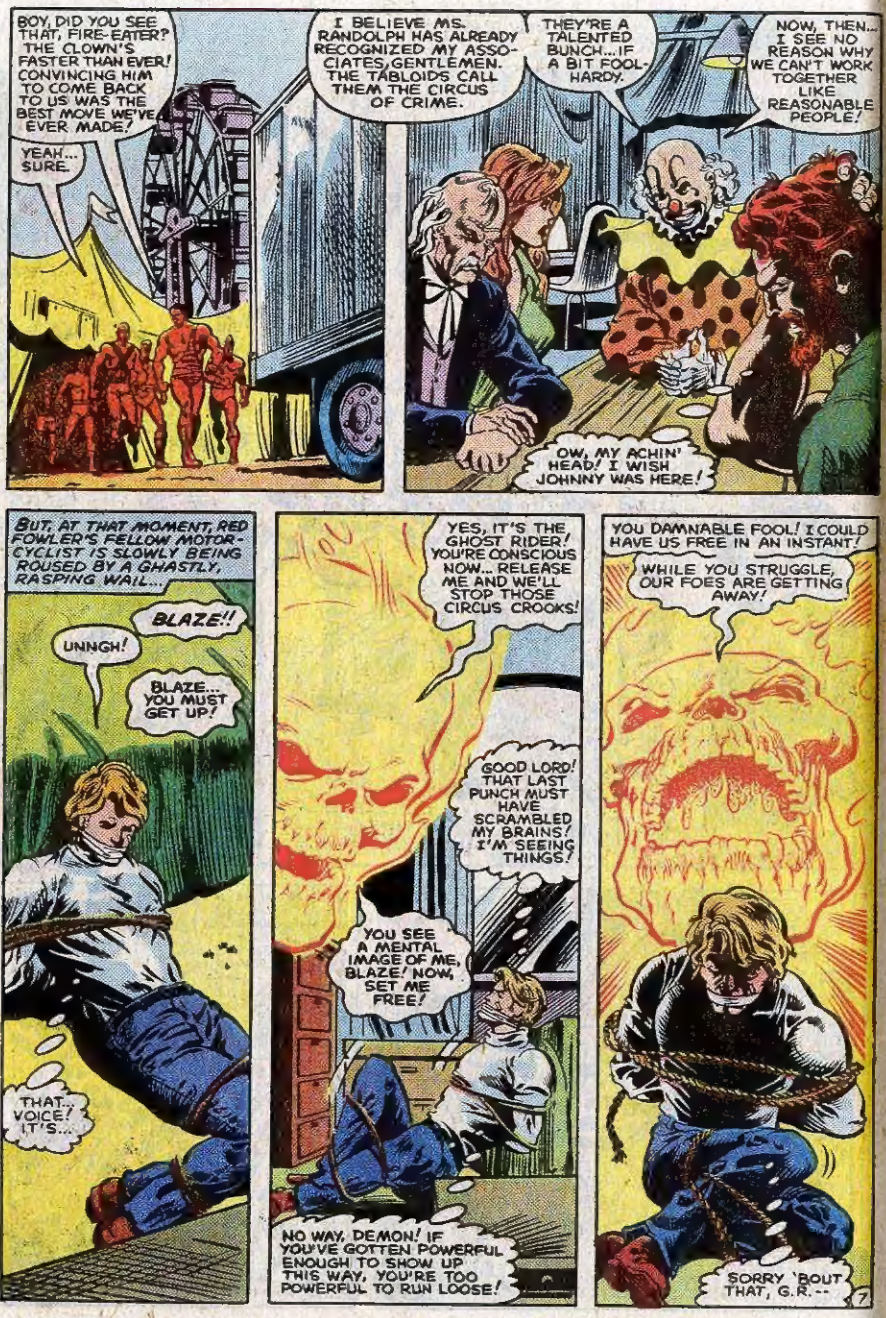
BOY, DID YOU SEE THAT, FIRE-EATER? THE CLOWN'S FASTER THAN EVER! CONVINCING HIM TO COME BACK TO US WAS THE BEST MOVE WE'VE EVER MADE!
YEAH... SURE.
I BELIEVE MS. RANDOLPH HAS ALREADY RECOGNIZED MY ASSOCIATES, GENTLEMEN. THE TABLOIDS CALL THEM THE CIRCUS OF CRIME.
THEY'RE A TALENTED BUNCH... IF A BIT FOOLHARDY.
NOW, THEN... I SEE NO REASON WHY WE CAN'T WORK TOGETHER LIKE REASONABLE PEOPLE!
OW, MY ACHIN' HEAD! I WISH JOHNNY WAS HERE!
BUT, AT THAT MOMENT, RED FOWLER'S FELLOW MOTORCYCLIST IS SLOWLY BEING ROUSED BY A GHASTLY, RASPING WAIL...
BLAZE!!
UNNGH!
BLAZE... YOU MUST GET UP!
THAT... VOICE! IT'S...
YES, IT'S THE GHOST RIDER! YOU'RE CONSCIOUS NOW... RELEASE ME AND WE'LL STOP THOSE CIRCUS CROOKS!
GOOD LORD! THAT LAST PUNCH MUST HAVE SCRAMBLED MY BRAINS! I'M SEEING THINGS!
YOU SEE A MENTAL IMAGE OF ME, BLAZE! NOW, SET ME FREE!
NO WAY, DEMON! IF YOU'VE GOTTEN POWERFUL ENOUGH TO SHOW UP THIS WAY, YOU'RE TOO POWERFUL TO RUN LOOSE!
YOU DAMNABLE FOOL! I COULD HAVE US FREE IN AN INSTANT!
WHILE YOU STRUGGLE, OUR FOES ARE GETTING AWAY!
SORRY 'BOUT THAT, G.R. --
7

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--BUT I CAN HANDLE MY OWN FIGHTS! WHY DON'T YOU TAKE A FLYING LEAP AND GO TO HADES?
THE CURSE OF MEPHISTO HAS BONDED US
I... I'VE CALLED YOU ALL TOGETHER TO TELL YOU ABOUT SOME CHANGES THAT ARE IN THE WIND.
IT'S NO SECRET THAT WE'VE HAD A LOT OF PROBLEMS LATELY... BAD PROBLEMS. FACT IS... WELL WE'RE BROKE!
EXIT

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BUT I'M NOT TOUCHING THEIR DIRTY MONEY! THEY RE THE FILTHY WOODS-COLTS WHO PUT US IN THIS FIX!
WHAT?!
QUENTIN'S RIGHT! THESE SO-CALLED FRIENDS OF MINE TRIED TO COERCE ME INTO JOINING THEM--AND BREAKING THE CARNIVAL!
BUT THEY MADE A BIG MISTAKE...THEIR PLAN PUT MY POP, CORKY, IN THE HOSPITAL!
"SO I LED 'EM, ALL RIGHT... STRAIGHT TO YOU! GO GET 'EM!"
THE CARNIVAL FOLK NEED LITTLE ENCOURAGEMENT
ELIOT'S PLAN IS WORKING A LITTLE TOO WE...L, I'M A WRITER, NOT A FIGHTER! THINK I'LL SIT THIS ONE OUT IN THAT TRUCK!
STINKIN' CARNIES! I SHOULDA KNOWN SOMETHING WAS FISHY RIGHT FROM THE START! NO SELF-RESPECTIN' CIRCUS STAR RIDES WITH A CARNY!
GRAB HIM BEFORE... WHOOAH!
9

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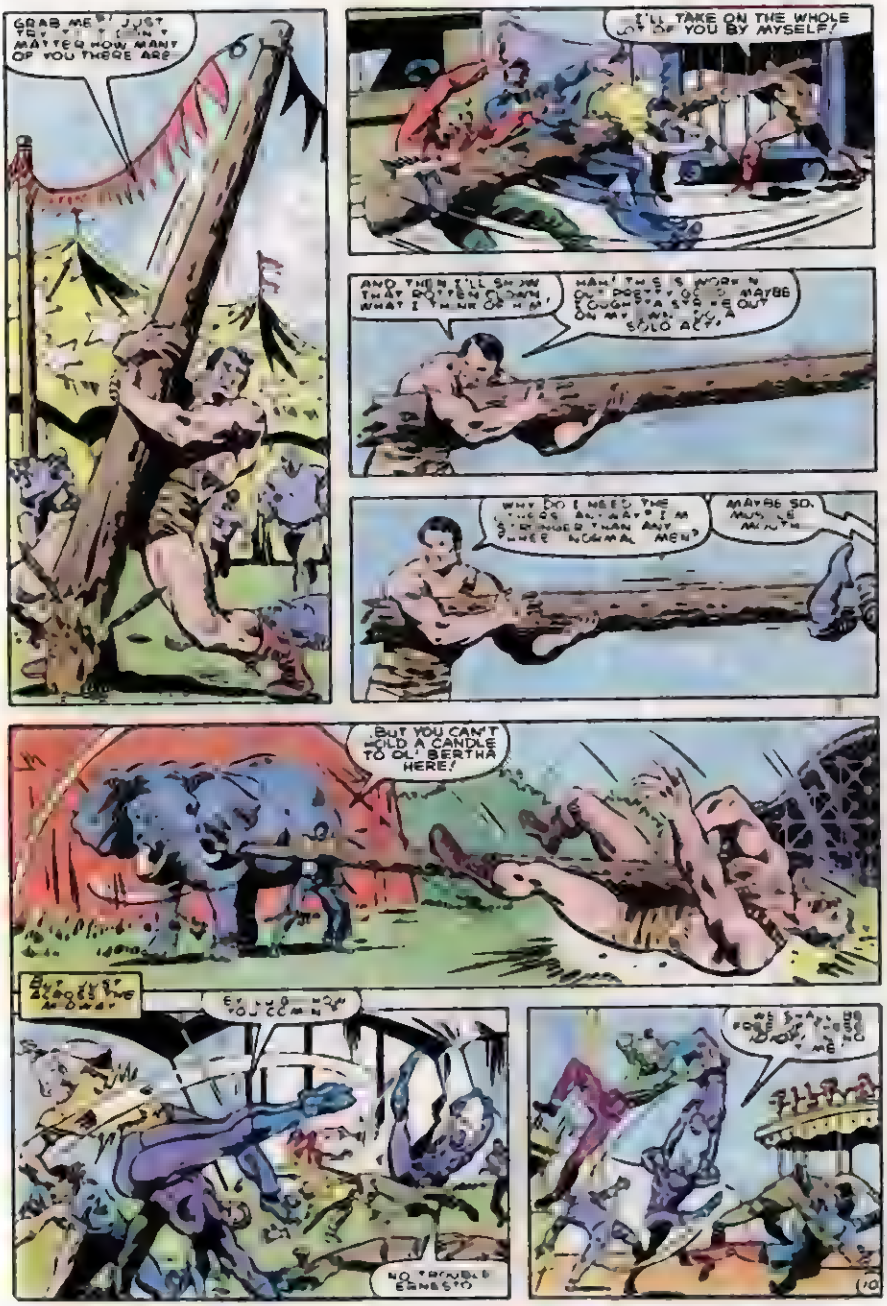
GRAB ME? JUST TRY IT! I DON'T MATTER HOW MANY OF YOU THERE ARE!
I'LL TAKE ON THE WHOLE LOT OF YOU BY MYSELF!
AND THEN I'LL SHOW THAT ROTTEN CLOWN, WHAT I THINK OF HIM,
HAH! THIS IS WORK IN ONE PRETTY OLD MAYBE I OUGHT A SAVE IT OUT ON MY OWN. I'LL A SOLO ACT!
WHY DO I NEED THE AVENGERS? I'M STRONGER THAN ANY THREE NORMAL MEN!
MAYBE SO. BUT YOU CAN'T HOLD A CANDLE TO OL' BERTHA HERE!
BUT I'LL GET THE MONEY!
ENJOY NOW, YOU CLOWN!
NO TROUBLE, ERNESTO.
WE SHALL BE FORCE TO BE NO ME!
10

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WHAT ABOUT US?
YOU WOULDN'T HIT A BUNCH OF DEFENSELESS WOMEN, WOULD YOU?
OF COURSE NOT, SIGNORINE
ONLY A CAD WOULD DO SUCH A THING! AND THE GAMBONNOS ARE GENTLEMEN!
THAT'S ALL WE WANTED TO KNOW!
TAKE 'EM, GIRLS!
GEEZ, IT'S NICE THAT CHIVALRY AIN'T DEAD!
MEANWHILE
LIVEWIRE'S FLATTENED NEARLY A DOZEN MEN WITH HIS ELECTRIC ROPE AND GUN IF I CAN JUST SURPRISE HIM...
SORRY, SON--BUT IT'LL BE A SNOWY DAY IN HELL BEFORE ANYBODY SNEAKS UP ON THIS OL' BOY!
GAHN!
ELIOT WAS RIGHT WHEN HE WARNED US HOW DANGEROUS THIS CHARACTER COULD BE!
NO USE DIVIN' FOR COVER -- WE'LL
I'LL ZAP YA NO MATTER WHERE YA LIGHT!
11

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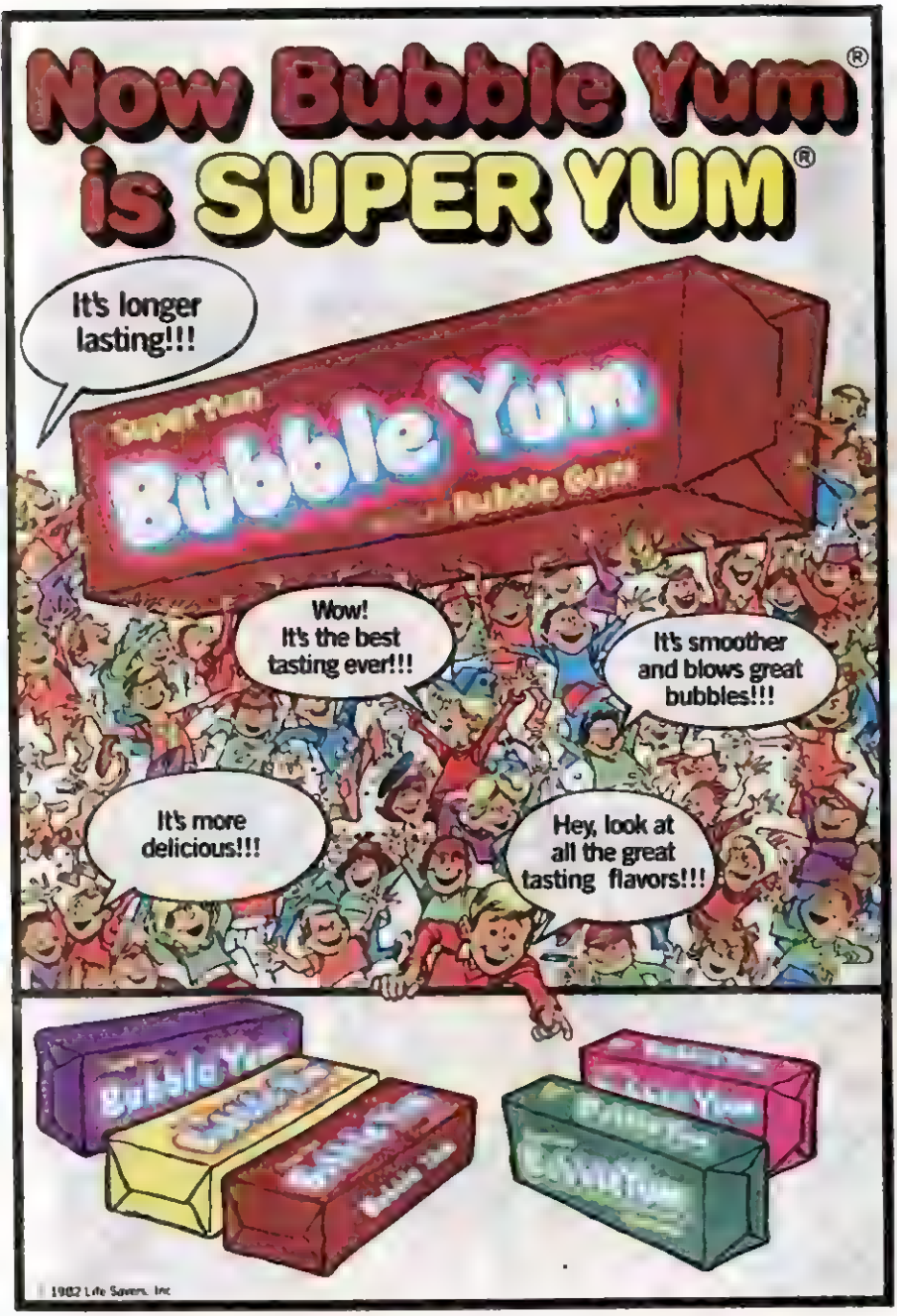

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THAT'S JUST WHAT I'M COUNTIN' ON, HOMBRE.
GO RIGHT AHEAD, YOU LAP, AND I'LL
ZLT-ZLT-ZLT
...JUMP!
DID IT THE ELECTRICAL ME— THAT POWERS THE BUMPER CARS PACKS MORE OF A JOLT THAN HE CAN AT COULD HANDLE!
AND, AS RED RUSHES TO TURN OFF THE JUICE...
TOO MANY OF 'EM TO HANDLE WHILE I'M GROUNDED! GOTTA GET TO MY CANNON LAUNCHER IN THE TRUCK!
NO ONE'S NOTICED ME MISSING YET GOOD!
I'LL BLAST A HOLE RIGHT THROUGH THAT OLD GEEZER!
OH, NO! I HAVE TO STOP HIM BUT HOW? CAN I CHANGE THE TRAJECTORY OF THIS THING?
NO, GO!
THIS GLORIFIED CATAPULT WON'T BUDGE! MAYBE IF I PUT MORE OF MY BODY INTO IT—P
SUCCESS! I'LL NEVER COMMAND ALL OF MY WEIGHT AGAIN!
FOOOM
12

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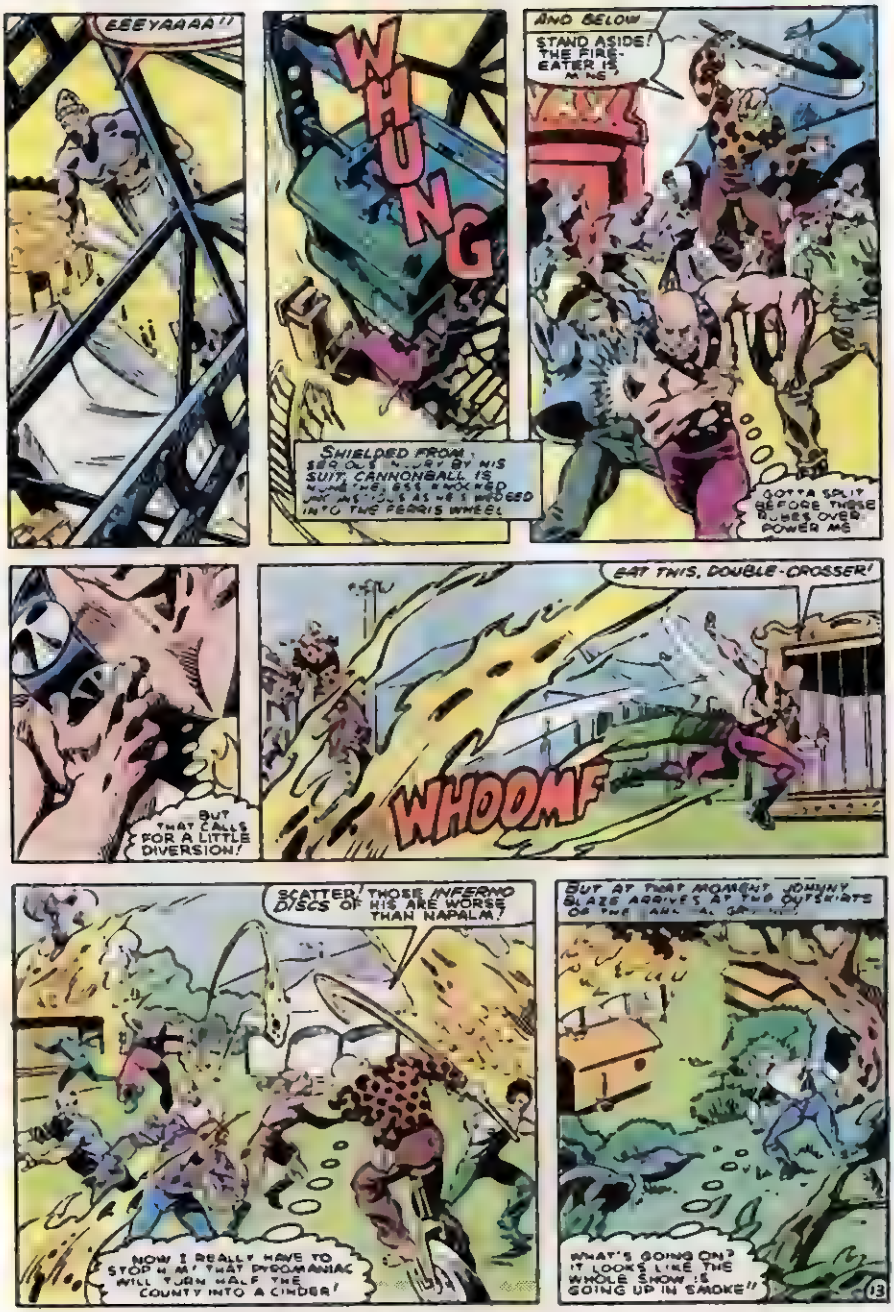
EEEYAAAA!!
WHUNG
SHIELDED FROM HEAT OF BLAST BY HIS SUIT, CANNONBALL IS KNOCKED OUT AS HE'S HURLED INTO THE FERRIS WHEEL
AND BELOW
STAND ASIDE! THE FIRE-EATER IS MINE
GOTTA SPLIT BEFORE THOSE DUDES OVER POWER ME
BUT THAT CALLS FOR A LITTLE DIVERSION!
EAT THIS, DOUBLE-CROSSER!
WHOOMF
SCATTER! THOSE INFERNO DISCS OF HIS ARE WORSE THAN NAPALM!
NOW I REALLY HAVE TO STOP HIM! THAT PYROMANIAC WILL TURN HALF THE COUNTY INTO A CINDER!
BUT AT THAT MOMENT JOHNNY BLAZE ARRIVES AT THE OUTSKIRTS OF THE
WHAT'S GOING ON? IT LOOKS LIKE THE WHOLE SHOW IS GOING UP IN SMOKE!!
13

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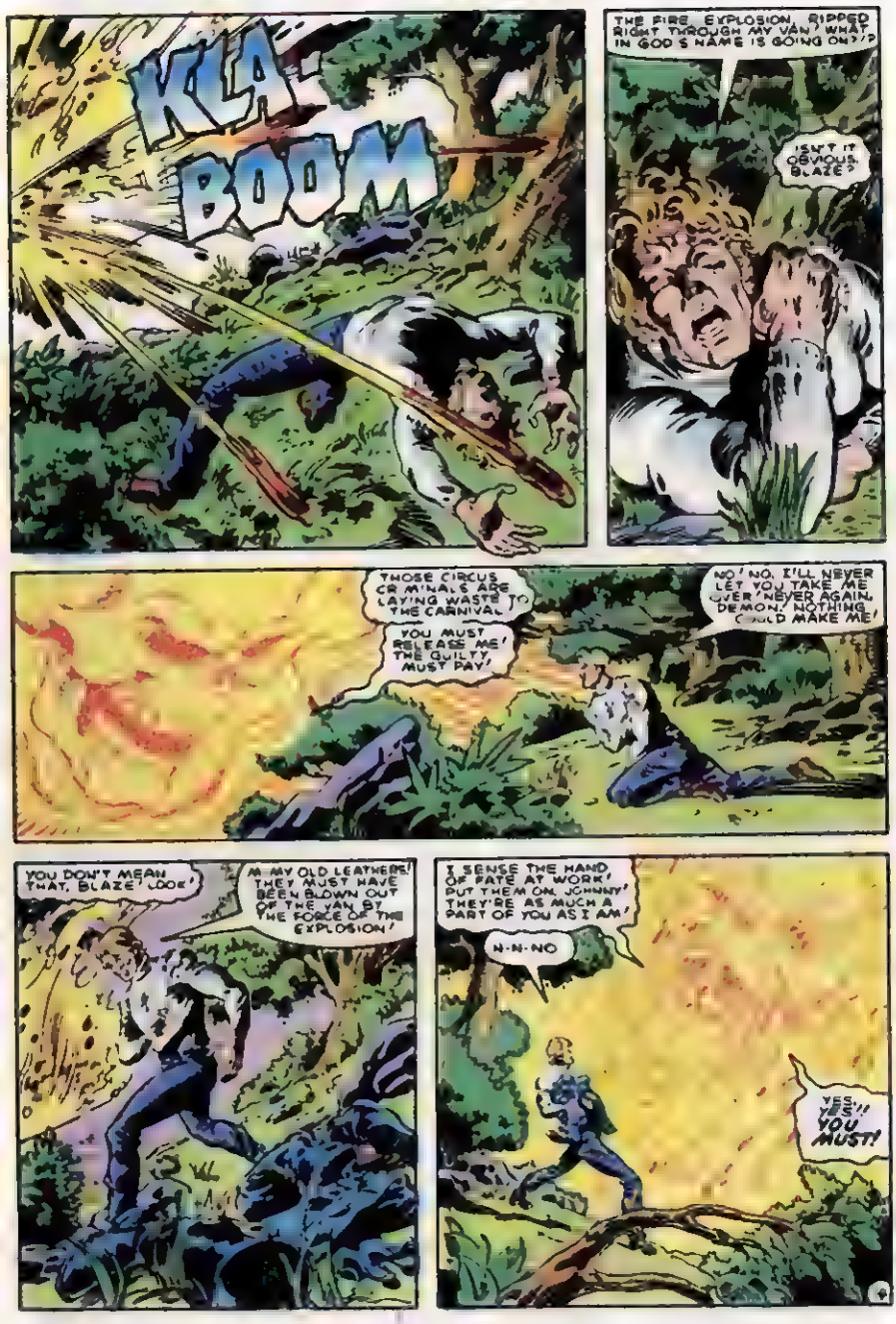
KLA-BOOM
THE FIRE EXPLOSION RIPPED RIGHT THROUGH MY VAN! WHAT IN GOD'S NAME IS GOING ON?!?
ISN'T IT OBVIOUS, BLAZE?
THOSE CIRCUS CRIMINALS ARE LAYING WASTE TO THE CARNIVAL
YOU MUST RELEASE ME! THE GUILTY MUST PAY!
NO! NO, I'LL NEVER LET YOU TAKE ME OVER! NEVER AGAIN, DEMON! NOTHING COULD MAKE ME!
YOU DON'T MEAN THAT, BLAZE! LOOK!
M-MY OLD LEATHERS! THEY MUST HAVE BEEN BLOWN OUT OF THE VAN BY THE FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION!
I SENSE THE HAND OF FATE AT WORK! PUT THEM ON, JOHNNY! THEY'RE AS MUCH A PART OF YOU AS I AM!
N-N-NO
YES!! YES! YOU MUST!

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YOUR FF ENDS NEED HELP! THEY'RE ALL BEING KILLED!
ONLY MY POWER CAN PUT AN END TO THIS! YOU KNOW THAT!
BUT I CAN'T TRUST YOU!
YOU CAN TRUST ME TO STOP THE MEN WHO ARE DOING THIS! THEY'RE GUILTY AS SIN... ALL OF THEM! YOU KNOW I'LL GO AFTER THEM!
LISTEN, JOHNNY! CAN YOU HEAR THE SCREAMS? YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO!
SET ME FREE!!
JUST A HUNDRED MILES AWAY
LOOK AT 'EM, SCRAMBLING TO SAVE THEIR CRUMMY ARMIES! THEY'LL NEVER CATCH ME NOW!
THEY DON'T HAVE TO!
I'VE DONE IT FOR THEM
YOU NEARLY KILLED MY OLD MAN, FIRE-EATER! I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU VERY SORRY!
5

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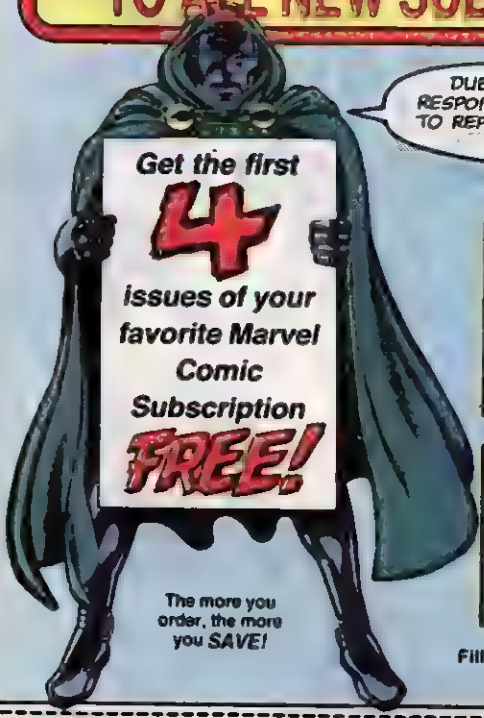

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GO TO BLAZES, CLOWN!
ARE YOU FORGETTING WHO HELPED YOU DESIGN THOSE D.SC'S? THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO THAT I CAN'T COUNTER!
IZZAT SO?
STUPID! I WAS A TOP FIRE-EATER BEFORE I EVER MET YOU!
TELL IT TO THE RUBES! STAGE MAGIC AND CIRCUS TRICKS WON'T SAVE YOUR HIDE THIS TIME!
I HAVE YOU CORNERED, PAL!
SUDDENLY...
WHUMF
HEY! WHAT THE--?
EH? FIRE-EATER WAS GENUINELY SURPRISED BY THAT WALL OF FIRE! BUT IF HE'S NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR IT, THEN WHO--
HA HA HA HA HA!

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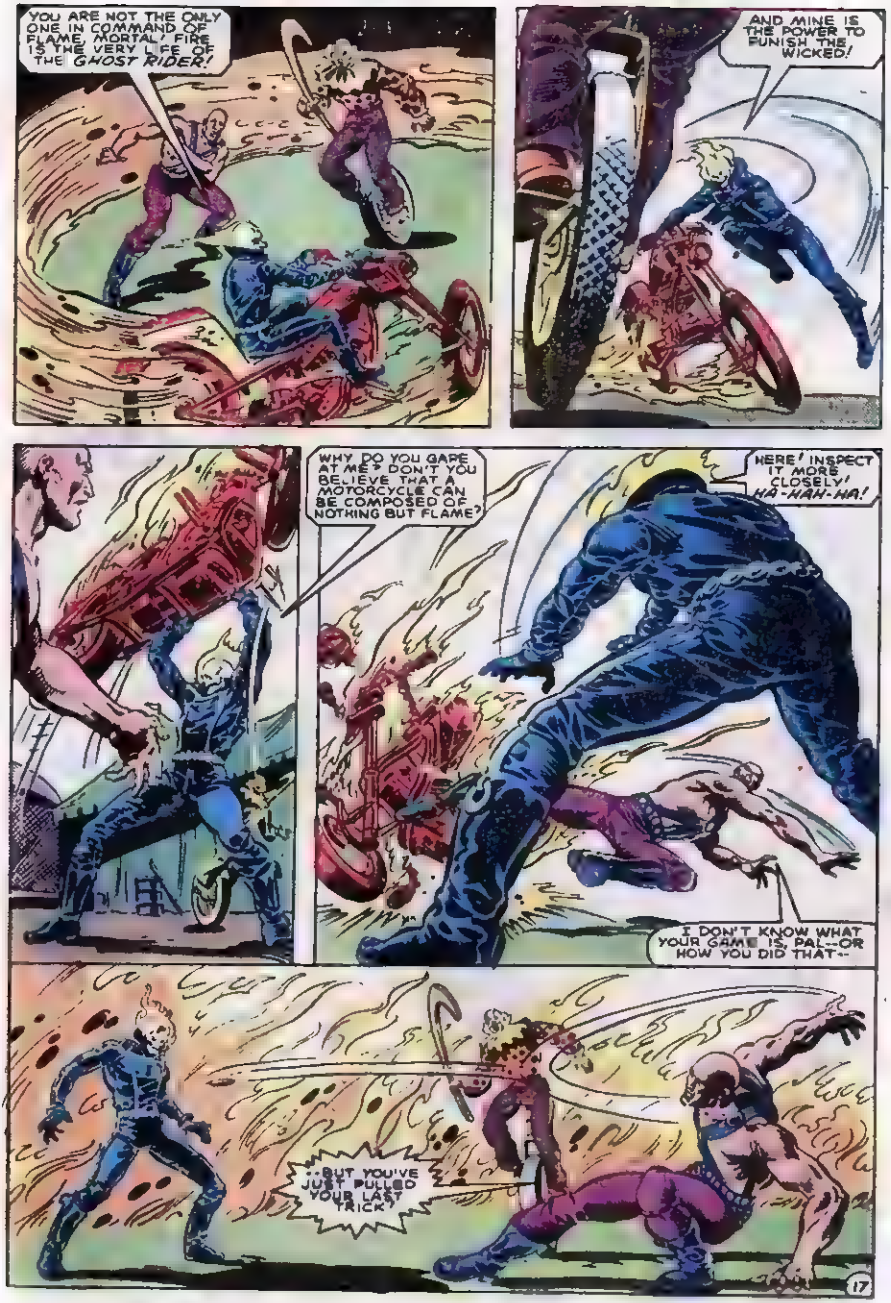
YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY ONE IN COMMAND OF FLAME, MORTAL! FIRE IS THE VERY LIFE OF THE GHOST RIDER!
AND MINE IS THE POWER TO PUNISH THE WICKED!
WHY DO YOU GAPE AT ME? DON'T YOU BELIEVE THAT A MOTORCYCLE CAN BE COMPOSED OF NOTHING BUT FLAME?
HERE! INSPECT IT MORE CLOSELY! HA-HAH-HA!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR GAME IS, PAL--OR HOW YOU DID THAT--
"BUT YOU'VE JUST PULLED YOUR LAST TRICK!"
17

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WHOOOF
FOOL! I JUS' TOLD YOU... FIRE IS MY ELEMENT!
N-N-NO! NOTHING HUMAN COULDA DONE THAT!
I NEVER CLAIMED TO BE HUMAN!
NOW, I GIVE YOU A CHOICE!
WHICH WOULD YOU RATHER FACE THE FLAME, OR THE GHOST RIDER? WHICH OF US DO YOU FEAR MORE?
FOR A LONG, HORRIBLE MOMENT, FIRE EATER STARES INTO THE DARK EYE SOCKETS OF THE GHOST RIDER. HE SEES NO MERCY
COWARD!
AND THEN, RIPPING OFF HIS BELT OF INFERNO-DISCS, HE DOES THE ONLY SANE THING.
HA HA HA HA HA
GOOD LORD!
GET SOME BLANKETS, QUICK!
WHAT COULDA MADE SOMEONE TAKE A HEADER THROUGH A WALL OF FIRE?
ONLY ONE THING...
THE GHOST RIDER! I THOUGHT I HEARD THAT LAUGH OF H'S! JOHNNY MUST HAVE RETURNED AND SEEN WHAT WAS GOING DOWN
HE'S LET THAT DEMON POSSESS HIM AGAIN! I HAVE TO CIRCLE AROUND AND STOP HIM.
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...BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!
YOUR FRIEND TOOK THE EASY WAY OUT
YOU SHALL NOT HAVE SUCH A CHOICE!
YOU MADE YOUR DECISION WHEN YOU JO NED THE OTHERS. THE ONES WHO ENDANGERED YOUR OWN KIN! THAT MAKES YOU DOUBLY GUILTY!
TH-THERE'S GONNA BE NO REASONING WITH THIS THING
I HAVE TO GET AWAY FROM HIM, BUT I'M CUT OFF BACK HERE!
MAYBE THROUGH THE TENT. YEAH!
THIS OLD CANVAS CAN'T HOLD UP TO MY STAFF! JUST ANOTHER SECOND AND--!
THERE IS NO ESCAPE, CLOWN!
THERE IS ONLY THE VENGEANCE OF THE GHOST RIDER!
SHAKING THE HELPLESS CLOWN LIKE A RAGDOLL, THE GHOST RIDER UNLEASHES HIS COLD FLAME! NOT A HAIR OF THE CLOWN IS SINGED.

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... BUT HIS SOUL KNOWS TORTURES BEYOND IMAGINING!
HE REMEMBERS
ELIOT, YA GOTTA KEEP PRACTICIN' THOSE ROUTINES TILL YOUR TIMIN' IS PERFECT!
OUR FAMILY'S BEEN IN CLOWNIN' FOR GENER-ATIONS, AND WE'VE NEVER KNOWN WHERE OUR NEXT MEAL WAS COMIN' FROM. BUT YOU'RE GONNA BE DIFFERENT!
A MAN CAN BE A CLOWN AND A SUCCESS, AND YOU'RE GONNA PROVE IT!
YOU'RE GONNA BE THE WORLD'S GREATEST CLOWN... SO YA WON'T WIND UP STUCK IN THE CARNIES LIKE ME!
HE REMEMBERS EARLY MANHOOD DRIFTING FROM CIRCUS TO CIRCUS ON, YES, HE COULD MAKE THEM LAUGH, BUT THE BIG MONEY ALWAYS ELUDED HIM
HE GREW DISSATISFIED BITTER.
AND THEN, HE MET THE RINGMASTER AND HIS RAG-TAG CIRCUS.
THE RINGMASTER HAD FOUND A BETTER WAY TO BRING IN THE CASH...
..HE STOLE IT! SPELLBOUND AUDIENCES SUDDENLY FOUND THEMSELVES MUCH MORE AMUSED BY THE CLOWN LOVED EVERY WICKED MINUTE! AT LAST, HE WAS A SUCCESS!
BUT IT NEVER LASTED
THERE WAS ALWAYS SOMEONE A GREATER SOMEONE STRONGER WHO COULD STOP THEM LIFE BECAME AN ENDLESS SERIES OF PRISON CELLS AND JAIL BREAKS.
HE VOWED TO PUT IT ALL BEHIND HIM.
TO PUT AWAY THE GREASEPAINT, TO TRY AND MAKE HIS FATHER UNDERSTAND
BUT EVEN THAT WAS DENIED HIM.
A LIFETIME OF SORROW, GUILT AND FRUSTRATION IS PLAYED BACK--OVER AND OVER AGAIN--IN THE MIND OF THE CLOWN THAT IS THE WAY THE GHOST RIDER'S COLD FIRE AFFECTS HIM
FOR HIM, THAT...IS HELL!
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GHOST WRITERS!

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
387 Park Avenue South
New York, New York 10016

TOM DeFALCO
EDITOR
LINDA GRANT
ASSISTANT EDITOR

This little piece about me was supposed to appear a couple of columns ago but, as so often is the case with my work, it's running a little late. Hopefully, the extra wait hasn't decreased your curiosity about who the new Ghost Rider penciler is. If you really don't care, you're gonna find out a few things anyway.

Hi, my name is Bob Budiansky. (That's BUH-DEE-AN-SKEE. Now no one out there has an excuse to mispronounce it ever again, okay?) I was born and raised in The Bronx, New York. I no longer live there, but my barber still does. So much for background information.

I began working at Marvel Comics as British Department Editorial Assistant in May, 1976. Somewhere along the line I was asked to draw a Ghost Rider cover (#33). I did. And I did again and again and again. Somehow this turned into a regular assignment for me. I had become the Ghost Rider cover artist. In September, 1979 I returned to the Marvel staff, this time as an Assistant Editor (on good ol' American Comics).

Let's skip forward to summer of 1981. I'm still penciling Ghost Rider covers. Tom DeFalco, editor of Ghost Rider wracks his brain in his search for a new artist to draw the book's insides as well. Then, in a dramatic move, he looks under his nose. . . where sits a stack of my covers.

"Looks like a Ghost Rider artist," he says.

He sniffs the covers. They reek of sulfur and brimstone. "Smells like a Ghost Rider artist," he says.

He takes a bite out of a cover and his tongue is seared by soulfire. "Tastes like a Ghost Rider artist!" he says.

Without further delay, Tom strides through the hallways of the Marvel Bullpen to my office. And then, before you can say "sizzling skull-face," I take on the assignment, and here I am writing this to you. . . only a few letter columns late.

Bob Budiansky
3/3/82

Dear Ghost Hosts,

I really enjoyed GHOST RIDER #69. The art was great, and the characterization, especially on the supporting cast members, was excellently written. In fact, I'd say that this was one of the best GHOST RIDER stories I've ever read. I hope the new creative team of Stern, Budiansky, and Simons keeps up the good work.

I especially find promising the way in which Red Fowler is developing as a character. Roy, Bob, & Dave obviously have plans for ol' Red.

Seeing Johnny Blaze in a different racing-outfit was a nice change of pace. However, I can't see the Ghost Rider developing an affection for anything but his old leathers. The black suit matches his personality, eh?

Crawford Smith
128 Summit Drive
York, PA 17403

True enough, Crawford, but GR doesn't have much say in the matter. Ultimately, he winds up wearing whatever Johnny does. (Hey, wouldn't the demon look wild in a T-shirt and cut-offs? No? Oh.)

Dear Mr. DeFalco,

I would like to congratulate Roger Stern on his work on the GHOST RIDER. I loved his CAPTAIN AMERICA. . . he writes a fantastic DOCTOR STRANGE. . . and he's doing a superb job on GHOST RIDER. In my opinion, issues #67-69 have been the best stories of the entire series.

Oddly enough, the only thing I don't like about the book is the star. The Ghost Rider is the biggest jerk in comics. I hate his guts. He really thinks he's hot stuff, but he only fights normal humans. Let's see him fight a super hero for a change. I would really love to see him get his butt kicked just once!

Other than that, this book is really turning out to be something special. I like Johnny's position with the carnival, and I'm very glad that he and Red have become such close friends.

Keep up with stuff like this, and you'll be getting my money every month.

James R. Troost
3801 76th Street SW
Byron Center, MI 49315

Heck, James, you're *supposed* to hate Ghost Rider's guts! He *is* a demon, after all. . . and not a very nice one!

But you've made Roger so insecure! Don't you like his SPIDER-MAN stories? Why didn't you mention them, huh?

Seriously, though, we've enjoyed Rog's brief stay on GHOST RIDER too. But, he's heard the clarion call of the AVENGERS, and this will be his last issue for the foreseeable future.

However, there's no need to despair! Picking up the scripting reins next issue is none other than our own J. Marc DeMatteis! Marc's already shown his stuff on GR#67 and #71, and we're sure that you're gonna flip over some of the stuff he has planned!

Dear Tom,

GHOST RIDER #69 was every bit as good as #68, if not better. Some of the things I really enjoyed about this issue were:

Bob Budiansky's renderings of the Quentin Carnival! It really looked like a carny!

Ghost Rider's casual twisting of a steel wrench with no effort whatsoever!

Typewriter cussing. . . &!$%#!. . . now that's something we haven't seen in a long time!

And finally. . . we saw some good examples of the kinds of stunts Johnny Blaze is really capable of performing!

I didn't enjoy Harry Donovan and Cynthia Randolph. While Harry was certainly the best-written of the big, drunken oafs, that's still all that he was. And Cynthia reminds me too much of Harmony White from the old HUMAN FLY series.

Still, this is the best GHOST RIDER yet.

Terry Collins
337 Badgett Avenue
Mt. Airy, NC 27030

Dear Guys,

I can't tell you (but I'll try anyway) how superior GHOST RIDER has been lately. GR #69 strongly reinforced my ideas about this book's excellence.

I am heartily enjoying Ghost Rider's confrontations with mortals on earth — such as the motorcycle cop and Harry Donovan this issue — but I think that GR should occasionally confront more powerful opponents. I know the demon is having a ball punishing the guilty among mankind, but I'm sure he'd welcome a foe who was a worthy challenge to his power.

It was fun seeing GR go into action in something besides his leathers. It only makes sense that Johnny would wear something else now and again.

I also must suggest that JB remain with the Quentin Carnival for a while. He seems to have found a home with the traveling show. I realize that he's not likely to stay there forever, since his curse always seems to screw things up for him, sooner or later. In this case, though, I hope it is later. Still, with Cynthia Randolph snooping around. . .

In the creative department, I think the new team is working out just fine. Though I will miss Don Perlin's work. Bob Budiansky is every bit as adept with a pencil!

So there you have it! Until next month, and even longer. . . make mine Marvel!

Dave Schmidt
134 Senator Street
Brooklyn, NY 11220

Dear Mr. DeFalco,

GHOST Rider #69 was wonderful. Frankly, I had lost interest in the book until I saw this issue.

The artwork of Bob Budiansky and Dave Simons portrayed a really frightening mood. Keep it up and I'll keep reading.

Greg Beatty
134 Senator Street
Brooklyn, NY 11220

Dear Tom,

GHOST RIDER has always been my favorite Marvel comic because of the eerie weirdness of his personality.

I would like to see you bring back Roxanne Simpson into the series. It would be good for her and Johnny to get back together for a while. . . good for both of them!

The one thing I don't like about the book as it now stands is your logo. It doesn't grab me the way it should. Even the old logo circa issue #20 was better. How about it?

Jay Carcione
295 South River Road
Calverton, NY 11933

Well, Jay, what do you say to our newest new logo on this issue?

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BULLPEN BULLETINS

BUON GIORNO!

That's Italian for hello, and I am Editor-in-Chief for reasonable remuneration. Recently, I spent a week in Bologna, Italy, helping to represent Marvel Comics at the Bologna Book Fair, hence the Italian salutation. Was it fun? Does Gucci make shoes? Does Marvel make spelling mistakes? You may be wondering what, exactly, a book fair is. Well, it's a gathering of publishers from all over the world at which each publishing company displays its creations hoping that companies from other countries will be interested in publishing them, too. Marvel's booth, I'm proud to say, was the busiest at the fair. My job was to show off our exciting new stuff like our *Wolverine* and *Hercules* Limited Series, which you, no doubt, have already seen the first issues of, plus our Graphic Novel line, and our upcoming adaptation of *Dark Crystal* (Watch the Hype Box for details on these and other great things! Judging from our foreign publishers and agents' response to what I was presenting, our new projects are the best thing since sliced bread!)

It was mostly hard work at the fair — long hours in the booth having countless meetings with publishers and agents, then more meetings at our hotel before dinner, more meetings over dinner, and still more meetings over espresso sometimes far into the night. Even with the hectic schedule, though, I still managed to find some time to explore on my own. The most interesting thing that happened was... hmmm... No, I guess I shouldn't mention that. Okay, I'll tell you the second most interesting thing that happened. I was strolling through the Piazza Maggiore in the center of the scenic old city, where you can see Etruscan ruins, Renaissance palaces, and Bologna's own majestic leaning tower, when I spied something that I relate to much better — a gleaming Ducati motorcycle parked by the curb! As I was admiring this magnificent machine, its owner, a guy about my age, appeared. Now, I don't speak any Italian beyond hello, good-bye, please, and thank you, and the Ducati owner had a similar knowledge of English, but we both spoke fluent motorcycle. We managed to while away a pleasant hour or so having quite a discussion about the value of desmodromic heads and reed-valve carburetion. Nifty bike. Nice guy. Small planet, huh?

Meanwhile, back at the fair, the item that emerged as Marvel's number one attraction was *EPIC Illustrated* magazine. The competition among foreign publishers for the rights to *EPIC* was fierce. There's a reason for that, Brace yourselves for a plug, now — *EPIC* is terrific! Even though it doesn't fall under my editorial domain, I had quite a bit to do with *EPIC*'s creation and early success, so I feel very proud of the respect and admiration it garnered overseas. Archie Goodwin, Editorial Director of *EPIC*, and Mary Jo Duffy, Associate Editor do an incredible job — and it's not going unnoticed around the world. And that was a nice tidbit to bring home to them! Goodwin's still smiling.

OH, AT LEAST, HE WAS...

...until he arrived at his new office at Marvel's new address for the first time and discovered that the carpet layers had run out of carpet by the time they got around to the *EPIC* offices! Some how-do-you-do for "the next plateau", huh? Of course, as with any large-scale move, *lots* of things went wrong — but all in all, things went pretty well. The new Bullpen is light and airy and bigger than the entire town of Nanty-Glo, PA. We're still getting adjusted and making it into home, but generally everyone seems pleased with the new digs. Would you believe that our first housewarming card arrived at 9:15A.M. on our first day here? It was from Mrs. Eleanor Shooter (my mother. Aww...)

MOVING NOTES...

While packing, paste-up man Morrie Kuramoto turned up an old, *old* Marvel phone list with former Bullpenner *Mario Puzo* on it. We knew him when...!

Naturally, before the move we had a "Farewell Old Bullpen Party" at the old place highlighted by a Paddle-Whacker Contest — you know, those wooden paddles with rubber balls attached to them by elastic strings? Well, Vice-President Mike Hobson and I could only manage eight hits apiece and finished near the bottom. Production Veep Mitt Schiffman outdid most of the young upstart Bullpenners with an impressive twenty hits, but the Assistant Production Supervisor Ron Zalme whacked an incredible fifty-seven hits to win. No sooner had he claimed his prize, though, than Editor Mark Gruenwald's lovely wife, Belinda Gass, casually picked up a spare whacker and easily rattled off sixty-one!

MEANWHILE, UPSTATE...

...while Marvel was moving, ace inker, Joe Sinnott, was hard at work — coaching a basketball team! The *Marvel Comics* team (catchy name, huh?) which Joe sponsors as well as coaches, finished this season with eight wins against only two losses to take the championship of the Saugerties Athletic Association Senior Boys League! Nice work, Joe — as usual!

A CLOSING THOUGHT

I've been getting a lot of mail lately, and that's good. *Please* write. All of us here love to read what you have say about our work and life in general. You may not get a reply — in fact, you probably won't get a reply because there are too many letters, too few of us and too little time, but since I've been Editor-in-Chief, Shooter's First Law of Mail has been in effect: *All incoming mail shall be opened and read by the addressee.* That means if your letter is addressed to me, I'll open it and I'll read it. No one screens anyone's mail here and none of it is ignored. Okay? Keep in mind that comments about a particular title should be addressed to that title's letter col, but if you've got something general to say — a comment about the covers on Editor Al Milgrom's titles, for instance — you can address your letter to Al and *know* he'll read it. I wanted you to know that.

Till next month...

Arrivederci!

Stan Lee

P.S. I can't hold it back! If I don't at least mention this, I'm going to explode! Ready? The EPIC COMICS GROUP is coming! There. That feels better. That's all I'm allowed to say, now — but I'll be able to tell you more about it next month!

We're getting better all the time!

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VENGEANCE SWEET, SWEET VENGEANCE, THIS IS THE MOMENT I LIVE FOR
KNOWING THAT THE GUILTY HAVE RECEIVED THEIR JUST DESERTS,
NO JOHNNY, NO! YOU GOT IT ALL WRONG!
FOWLER? YOU KNOW--?
I KNOW PLENTY! F-FOR ONE THING, I KNOW THAT YOU GOT THE WRONG MAN!
LIES! THIS MORTAL FOOL LED A CIRCUS OF CRIMINALS HERE!
YES, BUT ONLY SO WE COULD CAPTURE THEM! HE BETRAYED THE GUILTY SUCKERED THEM INTO A TRAP! NOT A ONE OF 'EM GOT AWAY!
HE'S NOT GUILTY?!?
HE MAY BE GUILTY OF A LOT OF THINGS, BUT NOT THIS!
JOHNNY, I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE SOMEWHERE! YOU GOTTA FIGHT THE DEMON! FIGHT HIM, MAN!
OH, POOR, POOR, I'M SORRY, I'M SO SORRY I DIDN'T WANT TO DO WHAT MADE YOU HAPPY
NO, NO, IT CAN'T BE THE GHOST RIDER CARES LITTLE FOR THE INNOCENT BUT NOT MY DESTINY TO
PUNISH THEM
SLOWLY THE FIERY, SKELETAL VISAGE BLURS, FLESH SEEMS TO GROW BACK--
..AND JOHNNY BLAZE RETURNS TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING
IT'S HAPPENED! IT'S HAPPENED AGAIN!
ELIOT.
21

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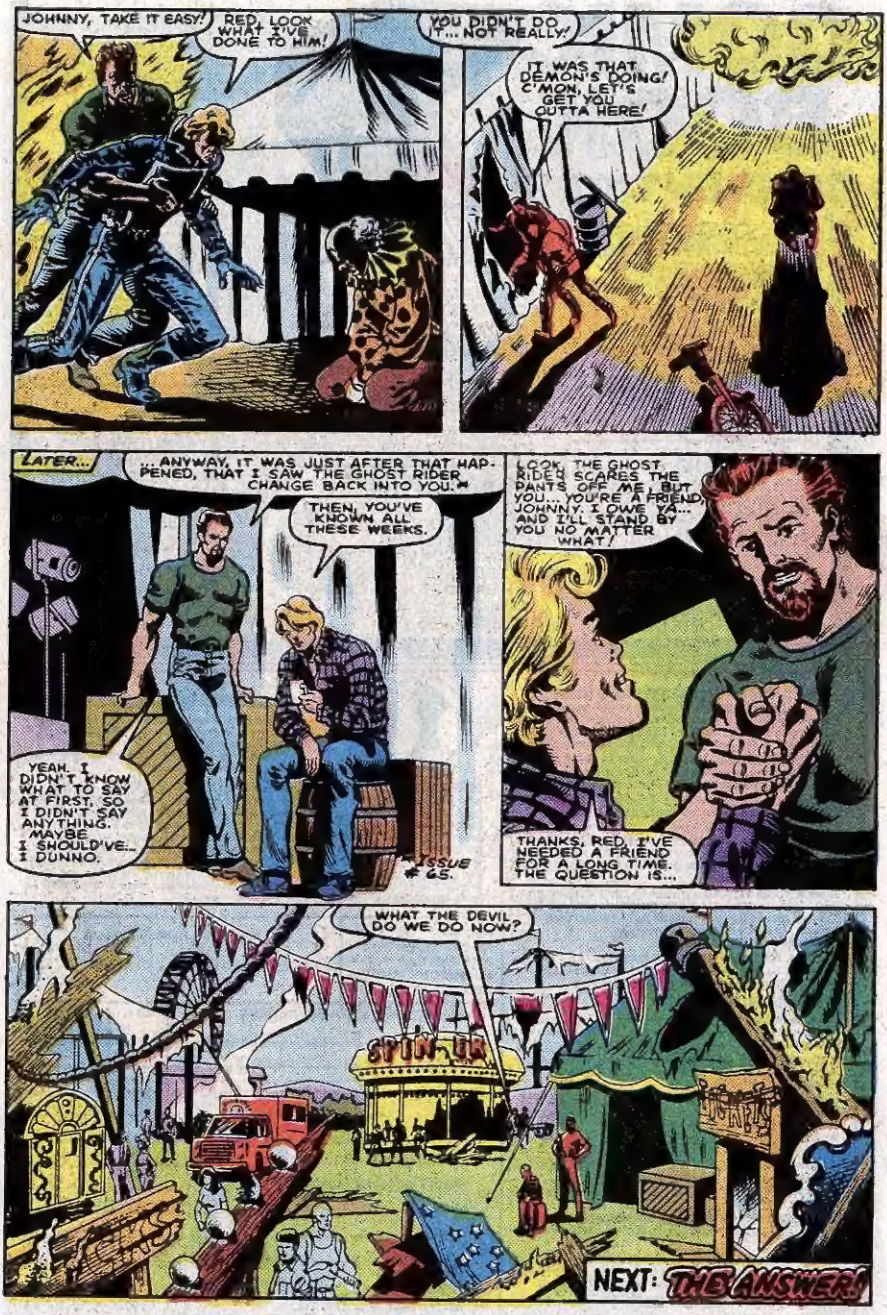
JOHNNY, TAKE IT EASY!
RED, LOOK WHAT I'VE DONE TO HIM!
YOU DIDN'T DO IT... NOT REALLY!
IT WAS THAT DEMON'S DOING! C'MON, LET'S GET YOU OUTTA HERE!
LATER...
...ANYWAY, IT WAS JUST AFTER THAT HAPPENED, THAT I SAW THE GHOST RIDER CHANGE BACK INTO YOU.
THEN, YOU'VE KNOWN ALL THESE WEEKS.
YEAH. I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY AT FIRST, SO I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. MAYBE I SHOULD'VE... I DUNNO.
ISSUE # 65.
LOOK, THE GHOST RIDER SCARES THE PANTS OFF ME, BUT YOU... YOU'RE A FRIEND, JOHNNY. I OWE YA... AND I'LL STAND BY YOU NO MATTER WHAT!
THANKS, RED. I'VE NEEDED A FRIEND FOR A LONG TIME. THE QUESTION IS...
WHAT THE DEVIL DO WE DO NOW?
SPIN-UP
NEXT: THE ANSWER!

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